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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES

STATUS OF THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Written statement submitted by Defense for Children International - USA, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following communication which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[15 January 1991]

1. Much of the rhetoric surrounding the Gulf crisis discounts an essential fact of the technology of modern war - the degree to which children and civilian noncombatants are victimized. In World War I, 90 per cent of the casualties were soldiers, and 10 per cent were civilian women and children. In current wars, an average of 10 per cent of the victims are soldiers, and 90 per cent are civilian women and children.

2. Defense for Children International - USA is appalled at the insensitivity shown to the lives of children when aerial bombardment of a civilian population is potentially condoned as a means of punishing a dictator, even when that dictator is a major human rights violator.

3. Former United Nations Ambassador George Ball states that a lesson he learned as a director of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey in World War II is that "There is no such thing as a 'surgical strike'." Not coincidentally, Ambassador Ball is one of the few observers to have pointed out that 1.5 of the approximately 4 million residents of Baghdad are 14 years old or younger; Ambassador Ball cautions that "America should not take responsibility for wiping out a considerable part of the young generation of Iraqis."

4. The potential casualty totals are devastating. The Centre for Defense Information estimates that in full-scale hostilities, "In the battle for Baghdad, civilian casualties might exceed 100,000." One can extrapolate that 40,000 of these victims would be likely to be children under 14. The children of the Gulf region are among the most disenfranchised populations on earth. They bear no responsibility for the brutal invasion of Kuwait, and must not be required to pay for it with their lives.

5. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that "In accordance with their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilian population in armed conflicts, States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by an armed conflict." (Art. 38, para. 4).

6. Also applicable are the Geneva Conventions, particularly the Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, and the Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions, as well as the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflicts which states that "... attacks and bombings on the civilian population inflicting incalculable suffering, especially on women and children ... shall be prohibited."

7. Defense for Children International - USA appeals to the international community to observe those safeguards for the civilian population which the United Nations has established with respect to armed conflicts. These protections are fundamental to children's rights.